

Old mines leave legacy of danger

Concern about liability blocks repairs to halt runoff of lead

...making fish in the Big River...
 Bobby G. Wixson, a researcher at the University of Missouri-Rolla studying the Big River pollution problem under a grant from St. Joseph Lead Co., the firm that originally produced the tailings, said there are a lot of good people all sides wanting a solution. The sad thing is, the company wanted to come in and repair the breach from the first, but their lawyers advised them they could be assuming responsibility from now on. He says Ronald Kucera, deputy director of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources said the state still is negotiating on friendly terms with the firm. See LEAD, Page A-8 Col. 1

A dike failure that has allowed thousands of cubic yards of lead-contaminated mine tailings to pollute the Big River here for the last four years never has been repaired -- because no one accepts responsibility for the situation. An apparently simple solution -- filling up the hole in the dam -- has not been tried because the troublesome water quality problem is ensnared in a legal argument over liability state and industry officials say.

While officials wrestle with the question of liability, rain continues to wash more mine wastes through the original hole in the retaining wall.

SITE	BIG RIVER MINE
ID #	MOD981126899
BREAK	133
OTHER	AR
	3-23-93

07CR

Missouri lead belts



40111560



SUPERFUND RECORDS

LEAD

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Joseph said, and hopes for a resolution to the issue before year's end.

The company is obviously worried about liability, Kucera said. They are not in the position that they have no liability what so ever. There is a lot of liability questions that they have to deal with. They are not in the position that they have no liability what so ever. There is a lot of liability questions that they have to deal with.

Some of the questions that they have to deal with are: What is the liability of the company? What is the liability of the state? What is the liability of the federal government? What is the liability of the private citizens?

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The cost of repair is minimal by anti-pollution standards, as little as \$200,000. The tailings pile is primarily a stone-lined, with about 75 percent lead now in the bottom of the heavily-fished stream for more than 30 miles. Potential environmental and public health problems are so serious that a lot of federal, state and university groups currently are studying the lead in the river or doing additional studies on the best ways to fix the problem in the dam. But the troublesome question of liability prevents everyone from making even stopgap repairs.

The tailings pile is one of dozens scattered along scenic Ozark streams throughout the historic old lead belt. A legacy of waste from mining in the last half of the 20th century, when industry and government paid little attention to the environmental effect of such materials. At least one was washed and filtered, some of the tailings were created and either buried in the ground or directly placed in huge amounts now used mostly in playgrounds for the little kids and in the same way.

It was just like a mine, but then with no regard to the future. And it was just like a mine, but then with no regard to the future. And it was just like a mine, but then with no regard to the future.

Many of those barren mine heap were abandoned after the government either the mine or the land for use as a landfill.

At the St. Joseph mine, an exhausted St. Joseph Lead in 1977 gave its 500-acre tailings pile to St. Joseph County, which transferred it to a non-profit corporation to use as a landfill.

Carly Welch, corporate director of environmental affairs for St. Joseph Lead, said the company handed the property over to the county in good condition, maintaining that the structure be maintained to prevent erosion of the dam that causes the pile from the river. In 1984, landfill operators built a containment structure and other work was done.

Landfill operators, some of them

basically, what happened, but they also deny liability for what happened next. The tailings pile was pond formed on top of the tailings pile with the combined pollution from the tailings pile and the water in the pond. The pond was about 100 yards long and 100 yards wide. The pond was about 100 yards long and 100 yards wide.

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Other, White, water quality supervisor for the department of conservation, said that his agency nor the department of natural resources has the money or the authority to cover the cost of the tailings pile. He said that the cost of the tailings pile is about \$200,000. He said that the cost of the tailings pile is about \$200,000.

The state has appealed to the corporation to clean up the tailings pile. The state has appealed to the corporation to clean up the tailings pile. The state has appealed to the corporation to clean up the tailings pile.

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Normally, lead is relatively insoluble throughout the lead belt, where the water is extremely alkaline. But the high lead levels found in the fish of the Big River suckers, 30 times higher than normal, indicate that lead from the tailings may be a problem for years to come.

We want to find out if it is a problem. We want to find out if it is a problem. We want to find out if it is a problem. We want to find out if it is a problem. We want to find out if it is a problem.

Virtually all discussion of the Big River litigation is limited to preventing more future spill. Kucera said. As for removing the tons of material along the river below the dam, he said, "It is not in the money to do that." He said that the dam was probably do more than that. The tailings pile is still there.



Huge deposits of lead tailings pumped through slurry pipes near the Big River 30 years ago have been washing into the river during heavy rainfalls. This gully created near Desloge, Mo., is approxi-

mately 60 feet deep and 120 feet wide. The tailings, composed mostly of limestone, have washed down the river for nearly 30 miles, killing fish and polluting the water.

—Sc. apx. aff

two in water

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